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NPS alumna to use education, Career Intermission for higher calling

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MC2 Patrick Dionne and Khaboshi Imbukwa | August 16, 2019



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Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/LD3M5ZHDcE4>

Tragedy struck Haiti on the morning of Oct. 4, 2016, when the 150-mph winds of Hurricane Matthew, a category five hurricane, struck the island nation. In its aftermath, 546 people had lost their lives and more than 1.4 million people were left in need of humanitarian aid.

The United States Navy responded, sending three vessels to offer immediate assistance after the storm. The aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), the amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19), and the hospital ship USS Comfort (T AH 20), which together delivered nearly 480 tons of supplies.

Lt. Sephora Fortune served as a Nuclear Officer aboard the George Washington at the time, but she shared a much more personal connection to the tragedy than the majority of her shipmates.

"I am originally from Atlanta, but both my parents are from Haiti," said Fortune. "My mom ran a ministry in the area where she grew up that includes a school and an orphanage."

Fortune feared the widespread damage likely impacted the school and orphanage her mother led ... Indeed, her fears were realized. Her mother was able to rebuild a simple structure that would at least keep the children out of the elements, but Fortune was compelled to do more, and found herself in a struggle pulled between her call to serve in the Navy, and a desire to help her family's native Haiti.

"All that had happened in Haiti rejuvenated my passion to help," she said. "Originally, my initial goal was to do my first term in the Navy and then get out and return to Haiti to serve. Over time, though, I recognized my calling was to continue to serve in the military ... I decided to stay in and save enough money up to send it back to help rebuild."

A year after the hurricane, Fortune's mother suffered a stroke making it difficult for her to manage the rebuilding effort, which by then was just the temporary structure to house basic services for the displaced orphans.

Due to her mother's struggles, Fortune recalled her time on the George Washington where she first learned of the Career Intermission Program (CIP). One of her fellow officers used the program to take a sabbatical from military service to further their education. The program allows active duty service members the ability to take up to a three-year sabbatical and transfer into the Individual Ready Reserve to address personal challenges or opportunities Sailors may experience in work and life.

"While at NPS, I applied for the program and was approved," said Fortune, who graduated from the university's Graduate School of Business and Public Policy in early 2019. "I can now devote full time to my mother's ministry work in Haiti."

During her sabbatical, Fortune will begin fundraising, and oversee the design and construction of a new development center in Mt. Charette, Haiti that will include a school, an orphanage, and a medical center where her mother's former ministry once stood.

"This is a multimillion-dollar project that is more of a sustainable grade, and it is much bigger than I could have ever imagined," said Fortune. "With my newfound business and financial knowledge and skills I acquired here at NPS, I can help shape my understanding of this project into not just a goal, but reality."

"I would not have been prepared to do this ministry work without my NPS education," Fortune continued. "My critical experience as a surface warfare officer, my background in engineering as a nuclear officer, and my education all come together now where I can really help make this new development center happen."

Fortune has already used her NPS skills to file the proper licensing needed to convert the ministry to a registered non-profit organization with the state of Georgia, as well as fine-tuning some financial details reducing the cost of building a quality facility in a remote location.

"Now I am going to go to Haiti to validate the project proposal and coordinate with the engineers to finalize the design," said Fortune. "This is a huge endeavor, and I would not be able to do it without the time CIP granted me, or the empowerment and know-how instilled in me at NPS."

